

SENATE BILL 197

Define Court Transcripts and Provide for Adjustments in Transcript Costs

Mr. Chairman, Senators, my name is Glenda Travitz. I am an official court reporter for the 21st Judicial District (Ravalli County) and current president of Montana Court Reporters Association. I am requesting your support of SB 197.

I would like to highlight what SB 197 seeks to accomplish.

SB 197 establishes expedited transcript rates. The setting of expedited rates by statute ensures that litigants pay uniform rates statewide when requesting expedited service.

At the heart of SB 197 is a request for an increase in the statutory transcript rates paid by non-government entities. Official court reporters retain transcript fees in lieu of receiving overtime pay for time spent in transcript production, and transcript fees are used by reporters to purchase the equipment necessary to produce transcripts and provide technology in the courtroom. This request is an historic event in that the fees have remained unchanged since 1983, a year before I began my reporting career, and it is only the fourth time such a request has been made since 1895, 114 years ago.

The requested increase is an average of the statutory rates for an original and one copy set in Wyoming (\$3.25), Idaho (\$3.25), and South (\$3.40) and North Dakota (\$2.25); and some of those sister states' rates are 12 years old themselves. I would note that, to my knowledge, North Dakota's rates are the lowest in the nation, and those rates were used in the averaging calculation to arrive at our request.

We are well-cognizant of the current economic situation and its impact on this legislative body, and we have structured this increase so as to have no impact on state coffers. We have excluded government agencies from our request for increase.

The bill requests a biennial adjustment on non-government rates based upon the Consumer Price Index. Due to the fact that the request is only applying the CPI every two years, the CPI adjustment would not keep transcript rates in step with inflation, but it would provide a mechanism for increases on a predictable time schedule. If the CPI language had been in place in June 2008, in July 2009 the rate for an original transcript page would increase \$.10, from \$2.00 to \$2.10; the copy rates would have remained unchanged.

When job positions open for official court reporters, it often proves impossible to hire a professional court reporter. This is due to a combination of a low starting salary and transcript rates that are among the lowest in the nation.

I respectfully request this committee vote "do pass" on Senate Bill 197. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Senators. I would be happy to answer any questions.

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